



## DIALOGUE/PERSPECTIVES

---

Discussing  
Religions and  
World Views

**Yael Attia and Sonya Zayneb Ouertani**

### **EU CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES – FROM MEMORY TO REMEMBRANCE CULTURE**

**POLICY BRIEF PUBLISHED BY**

***DIALOGUEPERSPECTIVES. DISCUSSING RELIGIONS AND WORLD VIEWS***

**SEPT. 2022**

## Preamble

This policy brief was developed in collaboration with *DialoguePerspectives. Discussing Religions and World Views*.

*DialoguePerspectives* is a programme dedicated to the development and establishment of new and innovative forms of interreligious/worldview dialogue. Its mission is to meaningfully contribute to European understanding and collaboration, to the strengthening and defence of European civil society, and to the shaping of a pluralistic and democratic Europe grounded in the principle of solidarity.

*DialoguePerspectives* launched its first European Leadership Workshop in 2021, where present and former participants in the programme with a proven track record in interreligious/worldview practice worked together to learn the core principles of policy writing. In this task they were supported by several inputs by and discussions with experts in the field of policy advocacy.

The European Leadership Workshop participants implemented their newly gained knowledge by producing three thematically diverse briefs on policy topics that are situated at the intersection of core societal questions and their relevance for a constructive, socially oriented, religious and worldview dialogue. They speak to central issues of European society such as combating discrimination, racism and anti-Semitism by advocating a pluralistic remembrance culture, strengthening the democratic process by empowering undocumented migrants and recognizing pluralistic co-living through the concept of ‘care communities’.

## Introduction

In recent years, there have been growing discussions with regard to memory culture at the EU level, in various European countries and beyond. New discourses regarding memory have begun to appear for various reasons, including Europe’s process of coming to terms with its colonial pasts and the manifold ways in which they continue into the present. Many of these discussions take place at the cultural and institutional level. Most visibly, they can be found in and around memorial sites and museums, where today doubts are being widely raised regarding the collection of thousands of artefacts from Africa, Asia and beyond, questioning how these made their way into European institutions in the first place.

This brief addresses the question of how to implement a more inclusive, pluralistic, interconnected and diverse remembrance, particularly in educational and cultural policies at the EU level. The focus is on remembrance culture because of its influence on the political present. Reformulating these policies in a pluralistic way can help to better comprehend Europe’s contemporary political struggles and dynamics as well as in the long run help to tackle anti-Semitism and other forms of racism and discrimination. A more nuanced understanding of

different histories and contexts in a multidirectional way can contribute to a better understanding of the current dynamics between minority groups in Europe and their relations to the hegemony. In other words, a pluralistic understanding of the past can enable a more tolerant and inclusive present.

This brief first defines the key concepts involved. Second, it describes the problem at stake through an assessment of the current dominant memory culture in the EU. It argues that memory culture as it is performed and produced today is entangled with and partakes in the reproduction of anti-Semitism, racism and discrimination. The brief then looks at current political strategies and practices in the fields of education and culture that the EU currently deploys. Finally, it offers recommendations for a more pluralistic approach to remembrance within the cultural and educational sector of the EU.

### **Definition of key concepts**

In this policy brief we distinguish between remembrance and memory. While memory is understood as commemorating historical events that are exclusively situated and concluded in the past, remembrance is defined as a process that proceeds into the present, emphasizing the relevance of individual and institutional agency. Therefore, remembrance is not solely about commemorating historical events; it is more about what meaning is assigned to them. This distinction between memory and remembrance makes it possible to think about the relations between the two as sites of contradictions and helps in challenging dominant narratives.

The kind of pluralistic remembrance culture embraced here is multidirectional. Following Michael Rothberg's formulation of multidirectional memory,<sup>1</sup> we believe that memory at the EU level should aim to resist the idea of uniqueness and particularity, and instead should favour a method of thinking the 'similarities of dissimilarities'. As collective memories often work under the premise that one's own national history is a separate and unique thing, multidirectional memory makes it possible to conceive remembrance in multicultural and transnational contexts. It mainly means drawing attention to the dynamic transfers that take place between diverse places and times during the actual act of remembrance. Thus, multidirectional memory can be a productive and valuable guideline for remembrance culture at the EU level.

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Stanford University Press, 2009, pp. 1-32.

### **EU discourses, practices and policies on memory**

Currently, the discourse on memory culture at the EU level centres on historical landmarks in European history.<sup>2</sup> It aims to reflect values seen as being European, such as ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom’, while grappling with questions such as how to relate to different national histories on a European scope. There are also unresolved dilemmas in the ongoing debates, such as how to deal with what seems to be competing frameworks of memories; for example, one contested domain is the seemingly reductionist history that limits historical complexities and nuances. Additionally, a disproportionate emphasis is put solely on 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarianism, which creates the appearance that European history begins in 1918 or that the Second World War is the ‘zero hour’.<sup>3</sup>

Today, memory culture and curriculum at the European level are predominantly implemented and practiced through the EU’s rhetorical, financial and institutional means to support, coordinate and supplement the actions of its member states. The EU’s supporting role in the field of culture and education is enshrined in its two core treaties: the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

First, there is a dominant singular EU official rhetoric about Europe’s past of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which are commemorated to build a future based on shared values and a common history. This rhetoric is evident in public statements by EU officials and resolutions passed by the European Parliament that construct the EU’s founding myths based on Nazism, fascism and Stalinism. This is additionally demonstrated by the most important EU commemoration day – the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of All Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes, one of the few European commemoration dates celebrated transnationally. There also seems to be silence or amnesia on specific topics and historical developments related to an EU remembrance culture, such as the colonial past. Through rhetorical means, the different perspectives and ambivalences in memory culture are narrowed and homogenized.

Second, the EU provides funding opportunities for cultural and educational projects promoting the interconnectedness of European rights and values, European citizenship and European culture based on a common history, cultural diversity, remembrance and shared values. Particularly in the framework of its Citizens, Equality, Rights And Values (CERV) programme, the EU funds projects in education and culture to promote a culture of remembrance that focuses on a shared history, culture and values with the aim to fight intolerance, inequalities, discrimination and racism within the EU. Thereby, a dominant narrative of the EU as a contemporary and future

---

<sup>2</sup> Aline Sierp, ‘EU Memory Politics and Europe’s Forgotten Colonial Past’, *Interventions*, 22:6, 2020 p. 692.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

space of diversity, mutual understanding and tolerance is constructed based on a historical awareness and remembrance that centres the EU's proclaimed purpose and achievements of peace and stability.

Third, through the House of European History,<sup>4</sup> the EU seeks to establish an institutionalized and Europeanized body of remembrance and history teaching that aims at overcoming historical divisions and creating a recipient for evolving content. This EU-funded independent institution organizes permanent and temporary exhibitions as well as producing publications in order to emphasize the European dimensions of historical events of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to enhance unity and debate on pan-European historical events. In this regard, a collective historical memory is reconstructed through a selective and inward-looking consensus-making.

### **Towards EU policies and practices of remembrance**

The activities and practices of memory culture and curriculum at the EU level today recognize the relevance of specific, horrific periods in the past with a focus on a singular, homogeneous history based on a claimed value system of tolerance and diversity. However, there is a lack of critical and self-reflective assessment and remembrance in relation to the political challenges of the present and future; for example, in relation to Europe being a centre of migration, not much is being done to include histories and contexts outside of the immediate European context. Hence, the current policies and discourses on remembrance in the cultural and educational fields at the EU level have fundamental shortcomings. One key consequence is that this contributes to a political climate in which minority groups are pitted against each other. One example is the externalization process of anti-Semitism towards minority groups, which in turn leads to a reproduction of racism and helps to maintain different forms of anti-Semitism.

Strengthening and applying a pluralistic, inclusive, interconnected and diverse multidirectional approach of remembrance requires an awareness of alternative forms of remembrance. Ones that are not exclusively conserved and documented by written sources or exhibitions of tactile artefacts within a museum and thereby resist a simple and static display of objects. As a consequence, cultural and educational spaces for multidirectional remembrance need to go beyond the approach embodied by the House of European History.

The EU should therefore set up a wide forum of diverse experts assigned to develop an agenda and strategies for a pluralistic culture of remembrance at the European level, one with a clear awareness of the risk of reproducing anti-Semitism, racism and discrimination. This forum would connect with institutions and civil society organizations working in the field of memory and

---

<sup>4</sup> House of European History, <https://historia-europa.eu/en/welcome-house-european-history>

remembrance, and support them in implementing new strategies that do not only operate at the national or local level but also address European-level challenges. The forum should agree on a specific terminology and conceptual framework; for example, the new definition of anti-Semitism that appears in the Jerusalem Declaration, which specifically distinguishes between criticism of Israel and anti-Semitism. One of the discourses where the externalization of anti-Semitism towards other minority groups is much evident is in the equation of every critique of Israel as anti-Semitism, overlooking the different contexts and histories from which the critique is being raised. A more inclusive remembrance culture that is multidirectional can allow different forms of past and present oppressions to be thought of together, analysing the similarities and dissimilarities.

A pluralistic remembrance culture needs to be understood and practiced as consisting of liveable experiences as well as of participatory and socializing processes that are not exclusively historicized and institutionalized within a building like a museum with limited access and insurmountable barriers for marginalized groups. Therefore, the discourses, policies and practices on remembrance at the EU level need to take into consideration the relation among, and the interconnectedness of, different histories as well as their engagement with each other. An awareness and acceptance of the contradictions, varieties and complexities in remembrance are necessary if the EU is to create a remembrance culture and habits that are not intrinsically racist, anti-Semitic and discriminatory.

---

### The Authors

**Yael Attia** is a doctoral fellow at the research training group (RTG) Minor Cosmopolitanisms, at the University of Potsdam, working on the intersections of Jewish thought and postcolonial theory. She co-hosts the RTG's podcast, minor constellations. For many years, Yael has worked as a guide at museums in Israel and Germany, among them, Yad Vashem, ANU museum of the Jewish people, and Jewish Museum Berlin.

Contact details: [yattia@uni-potsdam.de](mailto:yattia@uni-potsdam.de)

**Sonya Zayneb Ouertani** is a political scientist and activist, socially engaged in strengthening a diverse Muslim community in Germany and in Jewish-Muslim dialogue formats. In this regards, she focuses on strengthening complexities and varieties of remembrance as a discourse that does not (re-)construct a hierarchy and homogeneity of commemoration. She aims at analysing current political developments in critical, decolonizing and intersectional ways and creating spaces for active solidarity among marginalized groups.